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SCIENCE FICTION Quarterly

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the ★ ★ ★ Luckiest Man Alive!

By William Morrison

The man who won the contest for a perfect specimen to be named "Mister Earth" would be in a unique position!

“DO YOU LOVE me Grant?”

“No doubt about it Baby,” said Grant Hayes absently. He was tired of hearing the question, and he no longer answered it with the old fervor, but he couldn’t brush it off altogether. Not yet. Not as long as he still wanted to eat.

“You don’t act as if you do.”

“You know how I feel about you, Gilda.” His tone was careless, and he didn’t even bother to look at her. He stared into the mirror and smirked at what he saw there. Then his eyes wandered. They caught a headline on the newspaper thrown across the table, and he went over to pick up the paper. He turned over the pages idly.

“You haven’t kissed me once in the past hour.”

Grant Hayes was no longer paying attention. He had caught a glimpse of an ad on an inner page, and he was avidly reading the details. *Win Fame and Fortune!* it shouted.

It was almost as if the thing had been directed at him. His eyes glistened as he read. No stupid routine

work, no tiresome job without a future for a man of his talents. It was the kind of work that wasn’t work at all—the kind he loved to do.

“Grant!” she exclaimed petulantly. “You haven’t answered me!”

He gave her a glance, a single hate-filled withering glance. “Shut up, you old bag,” he said. “We’re through.”

He heard her shriek as the door slammed behind him. And that seemed to be that.



At the contest headquarters there was only one girl in the outer office. She had what he liked, and she knew it. And she knew what he was here for. She said, “Here’s your contest blank, sir.”

“How’d you know I wanted one?”

“I could tell by looking at you. You look like Mr. Earth in person.”

“Not yet, Baby, but I will be. That is, if this thing is on the level.”

“Of course it is,” she said indignantly.

“Ten grand to the winner?”

“And another ten for endorsements.”



Grant knew he could have his pick of girls when he won.

"And the movie contracts, and all the rest of it? It's a little too good to be true. They usually run these things for dames, not men."

She said demurely, "Don't you think that a woman likes to look at a good-looking man too? And if the woman has money, and nothing better to do with it—"

He grinned at her. "So a dame with money's in back of this," he said. "I

thought it would be something like that." He took a deep breath, and saw her eyes fill with admiration at the depth of his chest. "I wish we could cut out the preliminaries and have the final judging now."

"You men are always wanting to cut out the preliminaries. We can't rush things," she told him. "We expect entries from all over the world, you know."

"You won't find anybody in a class with me, sweetheart."

Her eyebrows went up. "It's all right for me to say it about you, but it doesn't sound so good coming from you. You're awfully sure of yourself, aren't you?"

"I've got a right to be. And I'm pretty sure of you too. No use getting huffy about it, either. Because when this is over, you and I are going to spend a lot of time together."

"I'm afraid you'll have better things to do with your time."

"I'll save some for you. But right now—here, give me that contest blank."

The blank, as a single glance showed, was simple enough. They wanted to know just enough about him to identify him.

The girl said, "They give you a medical examination."

"They don't have to. I'm perfectly healthy."

"There are a lot of men who are perfectly healthy. But do you have all your teeth? Are they in perfect condition. Ever lose an appendix? Ever have a broken collarbone?"

"So things like that are important, huh?"

"Very important. After all, this is a contest for perfect men, not weight-lifters or wrestlers. We want the best specimen we can find." She laughed at him and demanded, "Still confident?"

"Absolutely." But inside he was worried. The requirements were crazy. For all he knew, he might have a cavity in one tooth, or he might have broken one small bone that hadn't healed quite right. The ten thousand dollars seemed suddenly to elude his grasp.

"There's a fellow out on the West Coast won a Mr. State contest," she said. "He was really perfect. Not a thing wrong with him. What a man! But he married a rich woman he met and retired from competition. So maybe you've got a chance after all."

He grinned at her once more, all his confidence was coming back. "They can save time and make out the check to me right now. You'll see, Baby!"

HE WENT through the examination with the same confidence. A dentist studied his teeth, looking for flaws, and found none; a doctor went over his body, and then another doctor shot x-rays through him. After it was over, the dentist and both physicians spoke to him with admiration.

"The best set of teeth I've ever seen," said the dentist.

Grant grinned, and gave the man another sight of the dentures he admired.

"Not a bone misproportioned, not a muscle out of place," put in one doctor. "I don't mind telling you, Mr. Hayes, that I've never seen a specimen to match you. Never. Of all the men that I examined this week, not one comes close. If only I had half your physique—" he sighed.

Grant shook hands with them, pitying them. It was in the bag now. He had a vision of himself as he posed on a stage in a leopard skin, flexing his muscles. He could see them draping a band across his chest with the proud words, *Mr. Earth* blazoned across it, while the movie and television cameras ground away, and an audience of enraptured women and jealous men gazed at him, unable to tear their eyes away. He saw them handing him a check for ten thousand dollars—but that, he realized, was peanuts compared to what he would get later. The money for endorsements would amount to at least the same. There'd be local theater appearances, and a contract for a jungle film. And everywhere he went, he'd meet rich women—elderly, perhaps, but with no perhaps about their money and their admiration for a man with his build. He'd be a complete idiot if he couldn't find one with as

many millions as he had dreamed of, and a great eagerness to spend it on him. He saw himself set for life.

But the final judging of the contest would take time. He hadn't counted on that. He'd have to make up with Gilda. He didn't like the idea, but it would be only for a short time now, and when he got that first ten thousand he'd be through with her for good.

He went back, apologized carelessly, and told her he loved her. And it was as if he had never slammed the door.

•

He won the regional contest hands down, but there were other regional contests, and then a national contest, and at last the international finals. The national contest offered him competition, but he squeaked through. The international, he knew, was going to be more difficult. There was an Australian and a South American. Each seemed to his worried eyes as good a man as he was.

The girl in the office said to him frankly, "Grant, boy, you're out of luck. I think our Aussie friend's going to get it."

"You wouldn't kid me, would you, Baby?"

"Honest, Grant. Personally, I'd choose you—you're more my type. But I've sneaked a look at his chart,

and I've seen some of those comments the Australian judges have made, and as I say, I think you're out of luck."

His eyes grew hard. "It's a put-up job! It's been fixed from the beginning!"

"Don't be silly. It's just that they think—of course, I don't agree with them—they think that he's a better man than you are. They rate you as second."

"The fools!"

"I think so too," she agreed. "And, Grant, you know that there's first prize, and then nothing. No second, no third."

Grant was silent, and his perfect eyes began to see red.

"But you don't have to worry about me, honey. I'm sticking to you."

"Thanks, Baby."

But he wasn't thinking of her at all. He was thinking of the Australian.

THE FINAL judging was to be the next day. That night he acted. He had learned the name of the hotel where his rival was staying, and when the man came out, Grant followed. The man was going for a walk—Grant had learned that he always went for a five-mile walk before turning in, just to keep in condition. On a temporarily deserted

street, Grant caught up with him. A blow on the head from a club brought the Aussie to his knees. Then a hard, pigskin-gloved fist caught him in the mouth. Blood flowed, a tooth fell to the ground.

The Aussie was no longer a perfect specimen. Grant smiled, and disappeared in the darkness.

The Aussie didn't even show up for the final judging. There was a big newspaper story about what had happened to him, but no one could prove anything, and the promoters of the contest, anxious to protect their good name, were not eager to hear suspicions. Grant stepped out before the audience with a confidence that was at last perfect.

They liked him. He could tell that from the roar that went up, from the shrill screams as he posed there, his muscles flexed, his body shining with the oil that caught the highlights. The other man didn't stand a chance. The judges took time to confer, as was proper, in order to make it seem that they had considered both contestants thoroughly, but it was really no contest. When they announced their decision, it was what every one had expected.

Grant Hayes was Mr. Earth. The audience greeted the news with a roar that didn't quiet split the roof, but did loosen some plaster from the ceiling and bring it down with a crash that caused two fractured skulls.

Grant Hayes was Mr. Earth. Women and money—money and women—all he could want of both—they were his for the rest of his life. His nostrils dilated as he thought of them.



He was still thinking of them when he shook off some of the more ardent of his admirers and went into his room to dress. He flicked on the light switch, but no light came. Instead, a liquid voice said, "Don't worry, Mr. Hayes, we can see perfectly."

He was completely flabbergasted. He said, "What's this, a holdup?"

"No. We have no use for your money; we want you."

"Me? You're mistaken. I don't know you, whoever you are. I never heard your voice before. I never had anything to do with you."

"Of course not. Our interest in you is purely impersonal."

"I don't get it."

The voice said patiently, "But there is really nothing to get. We had spent much time studying your race, and we wanted a perfect specimen of the human male. To have sought him ourselves would have been very boring and tedious. We therefore arranged this contest. You have admirable business methods in your world, and we were enabled to do things by mail, giving the name of a woman to inspire confidence. Of course we have plenty of the material that passes on this planet for money. You see how simple it all was? Instead of our having to seek you, you sought us."

Of all that they had said, Grant grasped one thing. A cold sweat broke out on his forehead. "You—you're not human!"

"But you are. A perfect specimen."

He rushed at the door. It was locked. He fell against the wall, and found it covered with a soft, elastic material. He fell to the floor, panting and sobbing, and discovered that this too had been padded.

"We could take no chances of having injury come to so perfect a specimen," explained the voice, "especially after what happened to the other specimen last night. We want you just as you are. It will be useless to struggle."

His nostrils caught a strange odor, his senses became blurred. He heard the last words without really comprehending them. "You have been greatly admired here on Earth. Your body will attract even greater admiration on Mars."

It did.

